

25 Nov 2020

Dear Mr Jackson

My letter concerns the condition of the **Cobra Killuc Wildlife Reserve** that Parks Victoria (PV) manages: in particular, uncontrolled off-road vehicle damage to native grassland flora and an infestation of Bent Grass that urgently needs to be eliminated in order to preserve the native flora.

The 662 ha Cobra Killuc reserve, situated between Hexham and Woorndoo in SW Victoria, contains one of the most species-rich examples of Plains Grassy Woodlands remaining in Victoria. Less than 0.5% of the original Plains Grasslands remains on the Volcanic Plains, the once extensive flora having been removed as a result of alienation for agriculture, including the current cultivation of the wide road reserves. Apart from Cobra Killuc, with 532 ha established as a Wildlife Reserve in about 1980, with an addition of 130 ha of adjacent farmland in 2002, there are no other substantial reserves that preserve the grassland flora of the plains.

The Hamilton Field Naturalists Club visited this reserve on 21 Nov 2020. We were astounded to find that much of the area of the western portion had been used by 4WD drivers in the winter as a playground, with ruts and large bare areas created by 'circle work'. (Examples are shown next page of vegetation removal and Toad Rush that marks the tyre ruts). It seems that no PV Officer had been to this reserve in 2020 and the local lads had a clear run. Part of the problem rests with PV in not providing information signs stipulating that vehicles were not to go off-road – and giving information indicating what was special about the place and why off-road driving was detrimental to the values.

We accept that it is difficult for PV to adequately manage the hundreds of reserves that it is responsible for, given the totally inadequate funding of field staff, so one solution for this reserve may be to lock the access during winter months, when most damage is done. Whatever, signs must be provided to educate visitors, so that they are aware of the floristic values in the reserve and the direct damage and loss of species due to weed invasion that occurs by driving off-road in wet conditions.

Our dismay at the condition of the reserve was accentuated when we visited the eastern part, off Wordleys Lane. The first thing we saw was the infestation of Bent Grass on the roadside entrance to the paddock. It soon became apparent that 2-5 m circles of this stoloniferous invasive species occurred in the paddocks, on both sides of the fence that crosses the reserve (see photos below). Alarm bells should be ringing. This is a most destructive grass and, once widely established there is little hope of saving the native species. The Creeping Bent eliminates all as it widens its circle. As a matter of urgency, PV should promptly spray herbicide on the present circles of this pest plant. We found patches along the paddock track and off to the sides. It should still be possible to contain it.

The spraying has to be followed up for several years to locate and eliminate the invasive plant. That follow-up is best done after burning the grassland – fire does not appear to have been used there for many years and is one reason for the presence of Bent Grass and other pasture weeds in the sward. A regime of burning, perhaps every 2 or 3 years, is needed to preserve the integrity of this important reserve.

We ask that PV give this valuable grassland reserve the management that it needs.

Yours sincerely



Rod Bird PhD OAM

Secretary
Hamilton Field Naturalists Club

Photos next page.

Western part of Cobra Killuc Wildlife Reserve – damage to the native grassland by off-road vehicles



Eastern part of Cobra Killuc Wildlife Reserve, off Wordleys Lane



The Bent Grass infestation is shown by the vivid green patches. An off-track vehicle had been bogged and patches of Bent Grass were seen nearby, west from the fence.

The photo at left shows 2 of the four patches of Bent Grass that were seen on the Ridge Paddock, east of the fence.

(the views are back to Wordleys Lane)